

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 29, 2013

Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, Acting Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Sullivan:

We understand that a merger of the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest and Southwest regions is being considered. While we appreciate your recent commitment before the House Natural Resources Committee to keep the Southwest Regional Office open, we remain concerned about the potential impacts to California of the consolidation plan, particularly the proposed changes at the Office of the Regional Administrator and the Office of Sustainable Fisheries, and the potential loss of local fisheries science capacity.

California's fisheries are critically important economic drivers for coastal economies throughout the West Coast. In 2011, more than 400 million pounds of seafood worth more than \$200 million were landed in California ports. The current regional structure allows close proximity of senior fishery scientists and managers with local fishermen which is critical for effective management of these valuable fisheries. Consolidation of the Northwest and Southwest NMFS offices would weaken this relationship and make the sustainable management and growth of California fisheries more challenging.

We are also concerned about how the proposal will impact funding for fisheries science, which is critical to supporting the economically significant fisheries in our state. California's salmon runs are threatened by climate change and increasing competition for water by agriculture and urban interests. NMFS fishery managers and biologists located in California play a key role in ensuring that commercial and critically endangered runs are managed on the basis of sound science, including informing the Klamath River biological opinion and the ongoing Bay-Delta Conservation Plan process. California-based NMFS personnel are also critical for addressing issues unique to the region, such as U.S.–Mexico fishery agreements.

A diminished California presence would deal a severe blow to fisheries conservation as well as to the tens of thousands of people who make a living in fishing-related industries. California is home to a \$2.2 billion sport fishing industry that relies on day-to-day contact with both the Science Center and the Administration of the Southwest Regional Office. These relationships, direct communication, and on-the-ground knowledge help resolve problems in a timely manner and ensure the sustainable viability of fisheries and the commercial and sport fishing industries. The loss of the Southwest Regional office or personnel would severely cripple this type of specialized fisheries management and restoration efforts unique to California.

In addition to strongly urging the maintenance of key senior NMFS positions in California, we ask that you provide us and our staffs with the following information as soon as possible during the development of any consolidation plan: (1) the timeline and key deadlines for decisions regarding the allocation of NMFS positions among the West Coast offices, (2) the criteria that NOAA will employ to make these decisions, (3) a full assessment of the cost savings achieved by the consolidation, (4) an explanation of how Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) will be reallocated among offices according to each consolidation option under consideration, and (5) demonstration of how the proposed consolidation will support the mission of NMFS, particularly regarding California-specific fisheries.

Finally, we request that NOAA publicly disclose this information as soon as possible to allow for public review and participation in the consolidation decision-making process.

Thank you for your consideration of our position and requests.

Sincerely,


JARED HUFFMAN
Member of Congress

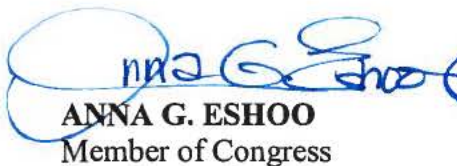

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